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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: POLISARIO AMBASSADOR SAYS RECENT MOROCCAN RHETORIC
UNDERMINES UN MEDIATION

REF: 08 ALGIERS 1269

Classified By: DCM William Jordan; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Polisario Front "Ambassador" in Algiers on November 17 portrayed the Moroccan government's tougher position on Western Sahara and its mistreatment of Sahrawi rights activists as a provocation designed to undermine UN Special Envoy Christopher Ross' efforts to restart talks, and he stated that Polisario would find it difficult to negotiate with Morocco under these conditions. End summary.

Moroccan King's Speech a Provocation

¶2. (C) Pol-Econ Chief and poloff paid a courtesy call November 17 on Polisario Front "Ambassador" to Algiers Brahim Ghali to discuss the status of UN-led talks between the Polisario and Morocco as well as the DCM's November 21 trip to Tindouf (reported septel). Over more than an hour, Ghali argued that Moroccan King Mohammed VI's speech on November 6, marking the 34th anniversary of the Green March, represented a hardening of Morocco's position designed to undermine the UN-led negotiations. (Note: Algerian press spotlighted the portions of the King's speech stating that one is either a patriot or a traitor with respect to the Western Sahara conflict. End note) The Polisario official asserted that the King has promoted an image of Morocco as a country concerned with human rights and democratization, but the speech showed that King Mohammed is continuing the expansionist and totalitarian traditions of his father. Ghali argued that despite recent Moroccan provocations, the Polisario has approached the negotiations in good faith without preconditions on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1754, which supports the Sahrawis' right to self-determination. He accused Morocco of demanding that the Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara be the sole basis for negotiation in renewed talks.

Polisario Expresses Skepticism over U.S. Statements

¶3. (C) Ghali said that Polisario's hopes for a fair solution had soared with the election of the President Obama, but Polisario was dismayed by the Secretary's recent statements calling the Moroccan autonomy proposal serious and credible. He claimed this gave more weight to the Moroccan plan, would negatively influence the atmosphere of negotiations, and would undermine UN Personal Envoy Christopher Ross' efforts. Ghali expressed skepticism toward Pol-Econ Chief's explanation that the Secretary's statement expressed the USG view of the Moroccan plan as a serious proposal among others, as A/S Feltman previously stated during his late October visit to Algiers.

¶4. (C) When Pol-Econ Chief noted that the U.S. is the

largest donor to the World Food Program's efforts in the Tindouf refugee camps, Ghali responded that the Sahrawi would not exchange their dignity for a piece of bread. He stated that the Sahrawi are simply asking for the right to choose their status. The Sahrawi people want to determine their fate freely through a referendum. He insisted that the Polisario leadership would support whichever outcome, including integration with Morocco, that the Sahrawi people choose.

Deportation of Sahrawi Activist Aminatou Haidar

15. (C) Ghali outlined the events related to the deportation of Aminatou Haidar, a prominent Sahrawi human rights activist and recipient of U.S. human rights awards. He stated that Haidar was arrested on November 13 at the Laayoune airport in Western Sahara upon her return from New York, where she recently received an award. Moroccan authorities arrested Haidar after she wrote "Western Sahara" as her country of residence on an airport entry form, as she has done previously upon entering Morocco. Ghali claimed that Haidar was interrogated for 24 hours before Moroccan authorities confiscated her Moroccan passport and on November 14 deported her to the Canary Islands.

16. (C) The Polisario official accused Spain of complicity in the deportation because it accepted Haidar without a Moroccan passport. (Note: Press reports stated that Spain accepted Haidar because she has a Spanish residency permit. End note.) Ghali stated that Haidar began a hunger strike on November 15 that she would continue until allowed to return to the Western Sahara and claimed that many Europeans,

especially Spanish citizens, have begun hunger strikes in solidarity. Lastly, Ghali questioned why the seven Sahrawi human rights activists arrested in Casablanca on October 8 were facing a Moroccan military tribunal. The activists were returning from the refugee camps in Tindouf, where Ghali claimed that they were visiting family members.

Praise for Ross' Efforts, But Skeptical on Future Talks

17. (C) Ghali praised UN Personal Envoy Christopher Ross as a diplomat experienced in the region who had undertaken multiple visits to Tindouf since his appointment. He also praised Ross' efforts to establish family visits by land through the berm, claiming that more than 20,000 Sahrawis were waiting to visit family members in the refugee camps. Ghali chided the Moroccan government for waiting four months to approve Ross' nomination as personal envoy. Ghali claimed that the Moroccan government's hardened position on Western Sahara and its mistreatment of Sahrawi rights activists are a provocation designed to disrupt Ross' efforts to mediate the dispute. He questioned why the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Ross had not reacted to these Moroccan actions. Ghali finally asked how the Polisario could resume negotiations under these conditions.

Polisario Warns of Potential for Violence

18. (C) Ghali cautioned that the region is full of extremists and that the Sahrawi people should not be pushed too far. They had waited nearly 35 years for a solution. He claimed that the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara could give birth to a Maghreb equivalent of Hamas. Ghali recalled that after the Polisario Front's last political congress in December 2007, it had taken the Polisario leadership three days to convince the Sahrawi youth that a peaceful solution to the conflict with Morocco was the right solution.

Comment:

19. (C) Ghali's comment on Sahrawi youth's growing frustration with negotiations is a familiar Polisario talking point.

During a 2008 visit to Tindouf, the head of MINURSO's liaison office told us that a rowdy group of young Sahrawi delegates criticized the peaceful approach to talks at the December 2007 congress, but he saw no evidence of action behind such rhetoric (reftel). Nonetheless, we believe the Polisario's concern over recent arrests and leadership statements in Morocco and their uncertainty about the direction of U.S. policy are genuine. Embassy will be alert to public signs that Polisario is becoming dubious about engaging in the next round of informal talks.

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